

Choosing the Right **TREE-PLANTING CONTRACTOR** for Your Family Forest



Photo: Stephen Fitzgerald, © Oregon State University

Choosing a tree planting contractor is an important step in getting your forestland replanted after timber harvests. Tree planting is expensive, so you want it done right from the start. Poor planting can result in failure, and it's even more expensive if you have to go back and replant later.

But how do you go about selecting a tree planting contractor who will do a good job for you?

Much of the decision is based on price, availability, and contractor personality. But there are other questions you should ask that require you to do some homework by checking into the quality of a contractor's work and business practices.

The questions below are not the only questions you could ask and should not replace “gut feelings.” They are meant to help you think through what to ask and what the contractors’ responses mean.

Questions to ask potential tree planters

What are your qualifications?

Here are some questions to ask prospective tree planting contractors. This part will require some homework on your part because you are essentially conducting a background check on the quality of their work:

- Do you have a degree or a formal background in forestry? Tree planting contractors may or may not have a formal degree in forestry or other natural resource disciplines. It is a business and skill that is learned by doing and working in the industry over several years.
- How long have you been planting trees, and who are the types of clients you’ve worked for in the past? Tree planting contractors who have been doing this kind of work for a long time for a variety of clients are likely good and reputable tree planters. Poor tree planters don’t last long in this business. Be sure to get their clients’ names and contact information so you can follow up.
- What is the quality of your work? How do you ensure your tree planters will do high quality work for me? This requires you to check into their background with prior clients. Most tree planting contractors have a foreman who oversees the tree planting crew, making sure the tree planters are planting trees correctly. However, a common practice is for you, the landowner, or someone else (a consulting forester) to inspect the operations while the trees are being planted. If a problem shows up (such as trees planted too shallow) the problem can be corrected immediately by communicating any problems to the tree planting foreman.
- Check into their business practices. Obtain their contractor license number and then contact the Better Business Bureau to see if the contractor has had any complaints filed against them and determine the nature of those complaints.

What tasks are to be performed?

There are several steps and tasks in planting trees. It is important to determine what you want the planting contractor to do for you. Do you want them to pick up and store the trees on site? Will you require scalping? How will the trees be planted? When? What level of tree planting inspection will the foreman be required to do? If you want to tube trees to protect them from animal browsing, do you want the contractor to perform that task?

The more you ask the contractor to do, the more expensive it will be. But it may be money well spent if you cannot perform some of these tasks, such as tubing or inspection, yourself. Again, all of this should be spelled out in a contract.

How will I be charged for your services?

Tree planting contractors usually charge on a per-acre basis, by the day, or by the tree. Tree planting costs on a per-acre basis, for example, depend on tree spacing, seedling size, how much scalping is required, the amount of brush and slash on site, crew travel distance, and several other factors.

Should I have a contract developed that spells out expectations and responsibilities?

If you are thinking about planting just a few acres, a formal contract may not be needed. However, if you are planting tens or hundreds of acres, a contract is important because the cost of failure can be expensive. Develop a contract that spells out roles for you and the contractor, performance expectations, tasks, and clearly stated costs. This helps clarify your business arrangement, avoids surprises and, ultimately, reduces risk to you and to the contractor. Be sure to specify in your contract how contract disputes and noncompliance will be handled.

Where to look for a tree planting contractor

The list of individuals and firms that can perform tree planting on your woodland property constantly changes. Here are some places you can look to find potential tree planting contractors.

- Ask other landowners who they work with and trust.
 - Oregon Small Woodlands Association: www.oswa.org
 - Oregon Tree Farm System: www.otfs.org
- Ask a forester.
 - Society of American Foresters: www.safnet.org
 - Association of Consulting Foresters: www.acf-foresters.org/
 - Oregon Department of Forestry: www.oregon.gov/ODF/Working/Pages/FindAForester.aspx
 - Oregon State University Extension Service: extensionweb.forestry.oregonstate.edu/directory

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- Contact local timber companies in your area. They plant millions of trees each year and are always hiring tree planting contractors. They probably could provide some names and contact information.
- Search the Oregon Forest Industry Directory for tree planting or reforestation contractors at: <http://www.orforestdirectory.com/advanced-search>. Click on “Services” at the top.

Helpful resource

An example of a planting contract can be found in the OSU publication, *Contracts for Woodland Owners* (EC 1192). Download your copy now: <https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec1192>

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